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RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI PRIORITY 4896
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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 CHENNAI 002552

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

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FOR SCA/INS, DS/IP/SCA and DS/IP/ITA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [ASEC](#) [CASC](#) [PTER](#) [PGOV](#) [IN](#)

SUBJECT: SOUTH INDIA REACTS TO HUSSEIN VERDICT: SECURITY NOT
COMPROMISED DESPITE PROTESTS

REF: A) STATE 182968 B) CHENNAI 2523 C) CALCUTTA 0513 and previous

D) NEW DELHI 07618

¶1. (SBU) SUMMARY: Reactions to the Saddam Hussein verdict from the left-leaning political parties in south India - Tamil Nadu, Kerala, Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh - ranged from mild opposition to strong condemnation. Protests were peaceful overall yet indicative of the region's steadfast opposition to the USG's policy in Iraq. In Tamil Nadu, nearly 400 arrests occurred after a demonstration in close vicinity to the U.S. Consulate General. All protestors were later released and no harm was caused to American citizens or locally engaged staff. END SUMMARY.

DEMONSTRATIONS IN CHENNAI: CITY ON ALERT BUT SECURE

¶2. (SBU) The Tamil Nadu Muslim Munnetra Kazhagam (TMMK) led an anti-U.S. demonstration on November 8 near the U.S. Consulate. At 4:30 p.m. protestors started shouting slogans against the USG and President Bush. Some of the demonstrators tied flags to their feet and stamped on posters of the President. When some demonstrators attempted to burn a U.S. flag and effigy of the President, police and event organizers stopped them. Approximately 400 police were deployed to the area and they began making arrests just fifteen minutes into the rally. Police presence was robust and dealt with demonstrators in an even-handed fashion. In total, nearly 400 protestors were arrested, all of whom were peacefully detained and later released the same evening.

¶3. (U) After we learned of the planned demonstration, on November 7 post issued a warden message to advise American citizens about the event. The message drew on the language provided in ref A.

¶4. (SBU) The TMMK (Organization for the Progress of Muslims) is a leading Islamic organization in Tamil Nadu, mainly championing communal causes. Although the TMMK has no history of organizing terrorist violence, it employs hardliner Islamic rhetoric in its rallies, which routinely draw hundreds of volunteers. The organization has a strong youth cadre disenchanted with the more moderate Muslim political parties such as the Indian Union Muslim League. The TMMK is not a political party yet; it does not contest elections but influences election outcomes through Islamic communal mobilization. The TMMK has consistently opposed Hindu groups and parties such as the RSS and BJP, as well as U.S Middle East policies.

SOUTH INDIA STRONGLY REACTS; NO IMMEDIATE THREAT POSED

¶5. (SBU) While the ruling DMK party in Tamil Nadu opposed the Saddam

Hussein death sentence on humanitarian grounds, several other parties such as the CPI(M) and the AIADMK strongly condemned it as "a rigged verdict delivered by a puppet court after a farcical trial which has made a mockery of the judicial process." AIADMK leader and former Tamil Nadu Chief Minister J. Jayalalitha went on record stating that no other outcome could be expected from a court setup by the United States in an occupied country. In Communist-led Kerala, Chief Minister Achuthanandan condemned "U.S. imperialist aggressions." Throughout the region, Muslim and Leftist organizations held protest demonstrations against the verdict, however no violence was reported. An editorial in prominent Muslim newspaper Madhyamam criticized the awkward silence of the Union Minister of State for External Affairs, E.Ahmed, a leader of the Indian Union Muslim League which itself has condemned the verdict.

¶6. (SBU) In Karnataka, reaction to the verdict was muted among both local Shia and Sunni Muslim groups, and featured small impromptu processions in towns located in the northern districts of Bijapur, Belgaum, Gulbarga and Bidar. Both English and Kannada language press carried condemnatory editorials. Roshan Baig, a senior Muslim Congress leader told Post that he expects a large protest in Bangalore after Friday noon prayers on November 10.

¶7. (SBU) Finally, Andhra Pradesh experienced minimal disruption. While the Communist parties and Muslims expressed disappointment over Saddam's verdict, minimal organizing occurred.

REACTION PREDICTIBLE: NO CAUSE FOR IMMEDIATE ALARM

¶8. (SBU) COMMENT: Demonstrations against the Hussein verdict were largely both predictable and contained throughout the south Indian states. Although public opposition to U.S. Iraq policy is genuine and widespread, the demonstrations were mostly an effort by

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relatively small groups to gain attention and appeal to their supporters. Solidarity with fellow Muslims has considerable resonance among south India's large Muslim population, while Leftists oppose what they view as U.S. violations of Iraq's sovereignty. Post will continue to closely monitor the situation as well as potential threat levels against Americans in the region.
HOPPER